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ABSTRACT

This study examined the importance of community service at 45 colleges and universities in urbanized areas of Ohio. A survey of the institutions' chief academic officers examined three dimensions: (1) amount of attention policymaking bodies give to community service; (2) community service's place in the curriculum and faculty work; and (3) the influence of external constituencies on community service at the institution. The chief academic officers rated community service as important to highly important but institutional policymaking groups were rated as not interested in community service and most institutional constituency groups were rated as not highly involved. Institutional representatives generally indicated that community service was not a formal requirement or part of the curriculum. Findings suggest that, despite increased attention to community service, as well as its importance in the stated mission of many institutions, community service remains a peripheral function that is not well integrated into most institutions. (Contains 22 references and 4 figures). (Author/JLS)

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HIGHER EDUCATION URBAN COMMUNITY SERVICE:

FROM PERIPHERY TO CORE?

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education Urban Community Service:

From Periphery to Core?

The authors analyze survey data from chief academic officers to explicate the importance of community service at 45 institutions in urbanized areas. A framework of centrality and environmental power is used to describe the degree of integration of community service into institutional mission and behaviors. The data suggest that despite increased attention to community service, as well as its stated importance to the mission of many institutions, service remains a peripheral function that is not well integrated into most institutions.

Higher Education Urban Community Service:

From Periphery to Core?

Community service--direct activity that provides demonstrable, identifiable benefits to a community--has been articulated as one purpose of colleges and universities in the United States since the development of land grant institutions and city colleges in the second half of the nineteenth century (Rudolph, 1990; Adamany, 1994). However, many commentators both inside and outside higher education have criticized colleges and universities for neglecting this dimension of their missions, especially as it relates to helping cities develop effective solutions to the multiple human needs confronting them (Bok, 1990; Harkavy & Puckett, 1991; Shalala, 1990).

The purpose of this article is to explicate the importance of community service in colleges and universities in urbanized areas. In many higher education institutions, research takes precedence over teaching and service (Boyer, 1990; Fairweather, 1994). In addition, the land grant influence has tended to direct the service and applied research programs at public comprehensive institutions toward rural rather than urban needs (Elliott, 1994; Rollins, 1985). As a result, many colleges and universities have missed an opportunity to strengthen and improve all three dimensions of their mission by creatively integrating research and learning with service to urban areas (Harkavy and Puckett, 1991).

Since the late 1980s, however, higher education's service mission has begun to show signs of strengthening. Across the United States, the level of student volunteerism has risen significantly. Campus Compact, the largest coalition of institutions promoting community service, began in 1986 with 12 member schools and 14 state/network offices. By 1994, that

number increased to 475 institutions in 15 states (Gamson, 1995). Moreover, private colleges and universities increased their expenditures for public service almost fourteen percent annually between 1986 and 1989 (McPherson, Shapiro, & Winston, 1993). In Ohio urban areas, state universities are engaging in more research focusing on the issues and concerns of their local communities. For example, in 1991, more than 250 faculty and students were involved in sponsored research designed to solve urban problems, train individuals to deal with urban issues, and develop research networks through the eight institutions in Ohio's Urban Universities Program (Regents' Advisory Committee on Urban University Programs, 1992).

Service has become a frequent topic in the tables of contents of popular higher education publications, as well as on the agendas of national education associations. Arthur Levine (1994) introduced a *Change* editorial with the statement, "It is no secret that volunteerism is booming on college campuses." Zelda Gamson (1995), in a subsequent issue of *Change*, boldly proclaimed, "Service has hit higher education big-time." In that piece she points to activities of national higher education associations as indicators of service's increased vigor. Organizations such as the Council of Independent Colleges, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the Association of Academic Affairs Administrators are all engaged in special projects related to service. The interest in community service is also reflected in professional development activities. For example, a one-day American Association of Higher Education "summit" in January, 1995 drew 450 campus leaders from around the country to discuss community service and service learning.

Concomitantly, mandates for higher education institutions to direct more of their academic resources to address the immediate and pressing problems of their local geographic communities also came from both state and federal government. The National and

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Community Service Act of 1993 created a vehicle for pouring $15 million into campus-based community service initiatives. Although, the future of this landmark federal legislation is in jeopardy in the current political climate, its very existence has created an expectation for higher education institutions to rebuild their communities and to renew the ethic of civic responsibility (Liu, 1993). While the federal legislation was being drafted, the Ohio Board of Regents (1992) called for community colleges to operate on a service principle with a high level of community involvement in institutional decision making.

INSTITUTIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING CHANGE

While there is currently considerable conversation and activity around community service in higher education circles, it remains to be seen what effect this "big-time" hit will have on how institutions of higher education carry out this function over time. Colleges and universities are conservative social institutions which tend to take a reactive, rather than proactive stance toward their environments. Their conservative nature and internal organizational and political dynamics work together to resist change and support the status quo both internally and externally. We think that the following clusters of institutional and environmental factors have considerable potential for influencing the future of higher education community service.

First, as open systems, colleges and universities depend on a healthy relationship of mutual exchange with their environments for their well being and survival (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The current environment of U.S. higher education is characterized by scarce resources, increased competition, and escalating demands for accessibility, relevance, and quality that most observers predict is unlikely to improve any time soon. As a result, institutions are becoming more selective about how they expend their resources (Hanson &

Stamen, 1989; Waggaman, 1991; Shapiro, 1993) and are adopting management strategies that emphasize institutional mission to sort priorities and effect decisions (Kellar, 1983; Seymour, 1993, 1994; Vandament & Jones, 1993). In such a climate, institutional growth and innovation come through substitution, rather than accretion. Community service initiatives become just one of many worthwhile initiatives competing for a limited pool of resources.

In an open system, the allocation of resources within the institution is a political, as well as a bureaucratic process. In times of resource scarcity, the allocation process is particularly sensitive to political influences as existing political coalitions within the institutions maneuver to maintain existing status and relationships of organizational structures thus insuring the perpetuation of the status quo (Hackman, 1985). A unit's or activity's ability to secure the institutional resources it needs for existence and/or expansion depends on the degree of organizational power it commands. Organizational power derives from two sources: internally, from a unit's or activity's perceived centrality to the core mission of the institution, and externally, from its ability to draw needed resources from the environment.

We assume if the revival of community service is to flourish and significantly influence the future direction of higher education, then community service must be perceived as being strongly connected and highly beneficial to a college's or university's capacity to successfully fulfill its mission and goals. An institution's willingness to commit valuable resources to community service activities will depend in good part on whether community service units and/or efforts are: 1) perceived as core activities which are central to the institution's mission; 2) able to attract external resources which the institution needs to support core activities and fulfill its mission. In light of the current shortage of resources, it

is likely that community service units and efforts will need to satisfy both criteria to some degree in order to survive and/or flourish.

Second, while the mission of U.S. higher education is usually defined as teaching, research, and service, the service element of that tripartite mission has traditionally placed a distant third to research and teaching as evidenced by such standard indicators as resource allocation and faculty rewards. In 1991-1992, public colleges and universities directed 33.2 percent of their financial resources toward instruction, 10.1 percent to research, and 4.3 per cent for public service activities; private institutions allocated 26.5 percent, 7.5 per cent, and 2.1 per cent respectively (Chronicle, 1994, p. 37). Studies on faculty work experience conducted by the Carnegie Foundation (Boyer, 1990) and the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University (Fairweather, 1994) found that among all institutional types the perceptions and practices of faculty reward, promotion, and compensation decisions place primary emphasis on research and/or teaching with little weight being given to a faculty member's level of service.

As a result, it is our proposition that in practice research and teaching are higher education's core activities. Service to society is primarily rendered through or results from its teaching and research functions, rather than as a distinct function (Crosson, 1985). Following Ernest Boyer's proposal (1990), we have recast the mission of higher education as learning and scholarship which are supported and effected through teaching, research, and service. From this perspective, if the revival of community service is to go beyond being "PC" (Levine, 1994) and truly effect the nature of what colleges and universities do, then service must allow faculty and students to engage more productively in the processes of knowledge discovery, integration, application, and transmission that comprise the enterprise we call scholarship. In other words, community service must become integral and necessary

to the academic core of the institution if it is to realize its potential for shaping the future of higher education. Therefore, in order to ascertain the position of community service in colleges and universities, we chose to locate our inquiry in academic affairs from the frame of reference of the chief academic officer who is responsible for the maintenance and vitality of the institutional core. Because of the centrality of academic affairs, its functions overlap with those of most other dimensions of the institution. As a result, the chief academic officer can acquire a comprehensive and complex understanding of the institution and its operations (Brown, 1984; Kerr & Gade, 1989; Moden, 1987).

We are aware that using a dualistic construct such as core-periphery may have shortcomings associated with simplifying highly complex phenomena. Nonetheless we use the core-periphery construct in this article because of its power to make sense of complicated and embedded decisions and its effectiveness as a tool for analyzing how colleges and universities currently function.

Finally, all colleges and universities may and do conduct community service; however, there is no single pattern of community service to which all institutions do or should adhere. How a particular institution approaches and implements community service will be influenced by characteristics such as institutional type, mission, and location. The sparse research on urban higher education community service has traditionally focused on "the urban university." This term describes an important but narrow subset of institutions that have an explicit mission to serve a particular central city area. Such an approach assumes, among other things, a sharp divide between the needs and concerns of the central city area and those of the surrounding region. This study casts a wider net in terms of institutional type by including all the colleges and universities located in one state's urbanized

areas[1]. Our assumption is that the needs and problems of our urban society and its metropolitan areas transcend arbitrary political or socio economic boundaries. We agree with John Bardo's assertion (1990; cited in Elliott, 1994) that "we may be much better served if we recast these issues as human problems of urban society than the unique problems of a particular political jurisdiction." For community service to have a major impact on how higher education performs in this country, it must be perceived as being an important part of what all institutions do, even as the nature and scope of that service differs by institutional type, size, tradition, and location.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

To ascertain the importance of community service at institutions in urbanized areas, we asked chief academic officers to assess community service in relationship to various dimensions of their institutions. These dimensions were: the amount of attention policy making bodies give to community service; community service's place in the curriculum and faculty work; and the influence of external constituencies on community service at their institution.

Methodology

Data Source

A target population of 55 accredited postsecondary institutions with undergraduate enrollments was identified from the 15 urbanized areas in Ohio. Urbanized areas (UAs) comprise one or more places (central place) and the adjacent densely settled surrounding

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[1]The U. S. Department of Labor (1990) defines an urbanized area (UA) as an area comprised of one or more places (central place or city) and the adjacent densely settled surrounding territory (urban fringe) that together have a minimum of 50,000 person.

territory (urban fringe) that together have a minimum of 50,000 persons (US. Department of Commerce, 1990). UAs were chosen because they are likely to have social service agencies with which higher education institutions can develop community partnerships. Also, the relative proximity of colleges and universities within UAs provides potential for acting collectively to solve urban community problems over a large geographical area (Greiner, 1994).

Survey Instrument

A standardized questionnaire of 16 items was developed and pilot tested in the autumn of 1994. The instrument was designed to obtain both objective and subjective data. The objective items included information about institutional mission and community service projects. The subjective data included observations about the relationship between community service and institutional governance, organizational behavior, and the external environment.

Data Collection

A questionnaire and personalized letter were sent to each of the 55 chief academic officers in November 1994. Following Dillman's (1978) "total design method," a follow-up postcard was mailed a week later. Three weeks after the mailing of the first letter, a second letter and survey were sent to nonrespondents. Forty-seven questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 85 percent. Of this total, 45 questionnaires, or 82 percent were usable.

Findings

Sample Profile

Three chief academic officers represented research or doctorate granting universities, four were affiliated with comprehensive colleges and universities. Eight were associated with liberal arts colleges, 22 with community colleges and 8 with specialized institutions. Twenty-four respondents were affiliated with public institutions and 21 with private institutions.

Importance of Community Service to Higher Education Institutions

In conducting the study, we sought to determine how integral or salient community service is to the colleges and universities in the target population. We posited that individuals' perceptions of their organizations evolve into realities such as norms and identity (Tierney and Chaffee, 1988). Therefore, we were interested in learning: (a) the extent to which community service is perceived as significant to various dimensions of an institution, (b) how much attention policy making bodies direct to community service, (c) the degree of incorporation of community service into the curriculum and faculty work, and (d) which external constituencies influenced community service involvement and relationships.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

To what extent is community service important to the various dimensions of higher education institutions? Chief academic affairs officers were asked to rate on a Likert scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) the significance of community service to ten dimensions of colleges and universities. The dimensions were associated with ten functional areas: community relations, institutional mission, institutional goals, academic programs, campus

culture, student services, fundraising and grants, student recruitment and retention, state government relations, alumnae/ni relations. Figure 1 indicates that community service is of very high importance to three dimensions --community relations, institutional mission, and institutional goals. Community service is important to highly important on the other seven dimensions ranging from academic programs to alumnae/i relations.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

How interested are institutional policy making groups in community service? Authority and responsibility are invested in and/or delegated to various policy making groups. How often a group discusses or advocates community service may indicate the salience of the topic to that entity. Chief academic affairs officers' ratings of nine groups or committees' (president's cabinet, governing board, student life committee, admissions committee, curriculum committee, curriculum committee, student government, promotion and tenure committee, alumnae/ni committee, and faculty/university senate) frequency of discussing or advocating community service are presented in Figure 2. No groups were rated as "very often" discussing or advocating community service. Two groups, presidential cabinets and governing boards, were categorized as often attending to or advocating community service. The other ten groups, including student government and faculty or college senates were perceived as rarely interested in community service.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

How involved are specific campus groups or individuals in supporting and maintaining community service efforts? A broad spectrum of campus-based constituencies

can be involved, either directly or indirectly, in one or more of a college's or university's community service efforts. Chief academic officers rated 15 groups or individuals for their efforts supporting and maintaining community service efforts. As Figure 3 indicates, only community service coordinators and college presidents were highly involved. Six groups, including chief academic officers and chief student affairs officers, were described as moderately to highly involved. Six of the remaining groups or individuals, including faculty and student leaders, were considered to have moderate involvement, while one group, financial aid administrators, were categorized as minimally involved.

To what extent is community service incorporated into the curriculum? College curricula make important formal statements regarding the values of an institution. The curriculum is the contract between a higher education institution and its students--it addresses what is to be taught and learned, how it is to be taught and learned, and for what ends. From an organizational perspective, curriculum is the heart or core of an institution. Therefore, we were interested in knowing *how is community service integrated into the curriculum?* We used three indicators of incorporation: the frequency that service projects are part of course assignments; the frequency that community service is the primary focus of courses; and the frequency that community service is a graduation requirement. Institutional representatives indicated that service tends not to be a part of the formal curriculum. Using a 5 point Likert scale, service projects were reported to be rarely or occasionally (2.8) part of course assignments. Also, community service was described as rarely (1.9) being the primary focus of course assignments, and never to rarely (1.7) as a graduation requirement.

Another indicator of the significance or centrality of community service to the institution is the relationship between community service and faculty work. In particular, we were interested in knowing *how important is community service to faculty personnel*

decisions and rewards? Chief academic officers' ratings of the importance of community service to decisions regarding institutional faculty grants, released time from instructional load, recruiting and hiring, promotion, salary, and sabbaticals indicate that service was considered of little consequence in all faculty matters. Within the realm of relative unimportance, service was judged (on a 5 point scale) as having more influence in promotion decisions (2.5) and least in salary decisions (2.0).

While all colleges and universities are environmentally dependent, in the best of all higher/education community partnerships various local community groups and leaders would be expected to influence higher education's community service. Chief academic officers were asked to evaluate the influence of 15 possible community entities (school leaders, local businesses, social service agencies, health care institutions, church and religious organizations, chamber of commerce, private foundations, other colleges and universities, mayor, fraternal and social organizations, county board, neighborhood coalitions, city council, law enforcement agencies, and labor unions) on fostering and maintaining community service. Somewhat surprisingly, no local external groups were characterized as having much or very much influence. As Figure 4 indicates school leaders, business leaders,

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INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

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and social services were the three groups rated as being somewhat important. All others were rated as having little influence on community service.

INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

In addition to local community influence, individuals and agencies at the federal and state levels also can effect the participation of community service by college and universities.

Federal initiatives such as the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) and, more recently, AMERICORPS are examples. Contrary to our expectations, chief academic officers' ratings of nine possible influences (college or university presidents, the Ohio Board of Regents, accrediting agencies, state legislature, consortia, the governor, national higher education associations, FIPSE, and AMERICORPS) indicated that only the influence of other college presidents was rated as important (3.4). All others, from the Ohio Board of Regents (2.9) to AMERICORPS (2.1), were viewed as somewhat to minimally important.

DISCUSSION

The data present a pattern of community service that is fraught with contradictions between rhetoric and practice. Although community service is said to be of high or very high significance to institutional mission and goals, academic programs, and campus culture, it is only occasionally discussed by most policy making groups and plays only a minimal role in curriculum and faculty work. Community service is perceived as being important to the development and maintenance of healthy community relationships, but no external group is perceived as exercising much influence on an institution's community service efforts. These contradictions, in our opinion, demonstrate higher education's ambivalence toward community service. Colleges and universities remain uncertain as to its role and status, both in terms of its centrality to institutional mission and core activities as well as its potential for attracting external resources.

Our data indicate that in spite of its stated importance and the increased attention paid to it, community service tends to be to be a peripheral function that is not well integrated into the fabric of most institutions. Despite claims of community service's importance to

mission and goals, it only occasionally makes the agenda of those institutional policy making bodies responsible for academic and student life, has no significant role in the curriculum, and remains peripheral to faculty work and rewards. Such distance from the core activities of a college or university is likely to reduce the power of community service initiatives to capture the valuable institutional resources requisite for their surviving and flourishing. Therefore, unless community service efforts can effectively extract from the external environment resources which the institution needs to successfully fulfill its mission and goals, then they are, at best, likely to remain at the institution's periphery.

The perceived importance of community service to good community relations may indicate that higher education recognizes the potential of community service for establishing and maintaining beneficial external relationships. The comparatively high level of presidential involvement in community service, as well as the perception that president's cabinets and institutional governing boards are more likely to address community service than are faculty senates or student government associations suggest that community service is more closely associated with an institution's public articulation then with its academic functions.

While community service initiatives can attract external funding through grants and donations and may appeal to prospective students, service activities are unlikely to generate large increases in income or to be more than a modest influence in student recruitment at most institutions. This does not mean, however, that such activities do not attract valuable and much needed external resources. They generate such nontangible but vital commodities as public support and trust, visibility, a positive institutional image, and community ties. For colleges and universities faced with unprecedented levels of public criticism and questioning of the their relevance and benefit to society, as well as demands for accountability from a

wide array of stakeholders, initiatives that substantially increase nontangible resources can be as valuable as those which raise dollars and student head count. Unfortunately, such nontangible commodities are often difficult to measure and in a restricted, competitive environment such as the one currently facing colleges and universities, nontangible resources may be obscured by more quantifiable and visible resources such as income and students.

Furthermore, commodities such as public trust and positive institutional image dissipate quickly when promised results do not materialize. While the current revival of community service may have many sources, it can, at least in part, be seen as a response to increased public demand for colleges and universities to reconnect with the communities which they were founded to serve and which continue to support them. Community service is being presented as a means for effecting this reconnection and for enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of undergraduate education. However, if community service remains a peripheral function of little consequence to the core activities of an institution, then it will not be a vehicle for change and the promised reforms are unlikely to occur. Community service will quickly lose its power to attract valuable external resources when it fails to live up to external stakeholders expectations. In light of this, its seems not merely plausible, as previously stated, but highly probable that the survival and flourishing of community service will require that it be both integral to an institution's mission and core activities, as well as able to attract external resources needed to support core activities and fulfill the mission.

It is beyond the scope of this article to offer strategies for bridging the gap between community service and the core activities of colleges and universities or for increasing community service's capacity for attracting much needed external resources. However, it seems evident to us that any such strategy must begin with rethinking both the mission of higher education and our understanding of community service. As stated earlier, we view

the mission of higher education as scholarship, the processes of knowledge discovery, integration, application, and transmission (Boyer, 1990), and service is one means to those ends. Such an approach calls for broadening our understanding of higher education community service beyond single dimension approaches such as economic benefit or social justice. Rather than defining community service as an activity separate from research and teaching, the higher education community needs to explore the potential roles and contributions of community service to knowledge discovery, integration, application, and transmission. Furthermore, colleges and universities, individually and collectively, need to become more cognizant of and articulate about how they serve their communities through each of the four scholarly processes. Such a multi-dimensional and nuanced approach could push us beyond the generic bow to service contained in most institutional mission statements and allow different types of institutions to more effectively articulate and act to serve the needs of their many and varied communities as Bok (1990), Harkavy and Puckett (1991), and Shalala (1990) have advocated.

Finally, the data collected on campus involvement in community service in urbanized areas offers one other interesting paradox. On one hand, the relative lack of distinction between the involvement of different individuals or groups on campus can be interpreted negatively. Since no individual or group is seen as clearly demonstrating ownership for community service, then one could conclude that community service has no institutional home. This homelessness can be seen as detrimental to the future of community service; for example, who will advocate for it in the budgeting processes? On the other hand, the data can also be viewed positively. Perhaps the current interest in community service spans traditional boundaries within higher education; after all, there is a significant overlap in the current literature between community service and service learning. Institutions might be able

to use the current lack of ownership to facilitate more radical changes in how they operate and in what they do.

In short, despite the increased attention currently being directed to higher education community service by the federal government (Liu, 1993) and clarion calls to service by higher education leaders like Arthur Levine and Zelda Gamson, the colleges and universities studied remain ambivalent to its appropriate role and status on campus. In most cases, community service in urban areas remains a peripheral function that its not well integrated into the fabric of the institution. The future robustness and effectiveness of the current community service revival is in no way certain. Its survival depends on closing the gap between rhetoric and action.

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Figure 1.

Importance of Service to Institutions

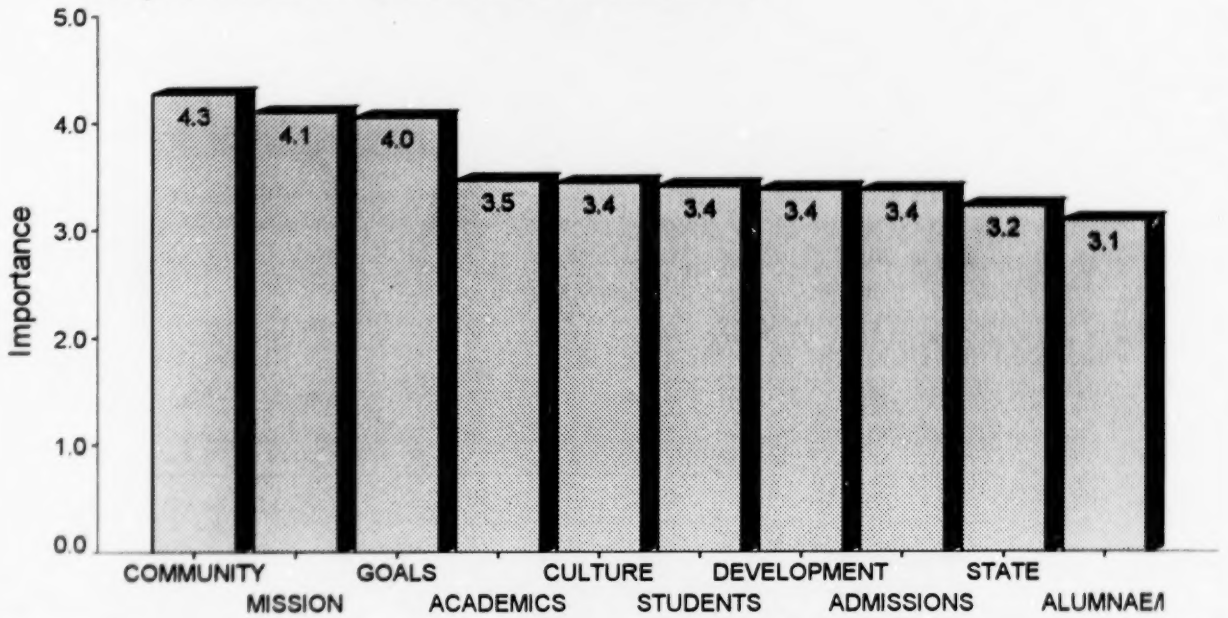

Figure 2.

Policy Making Groups Interest in Service

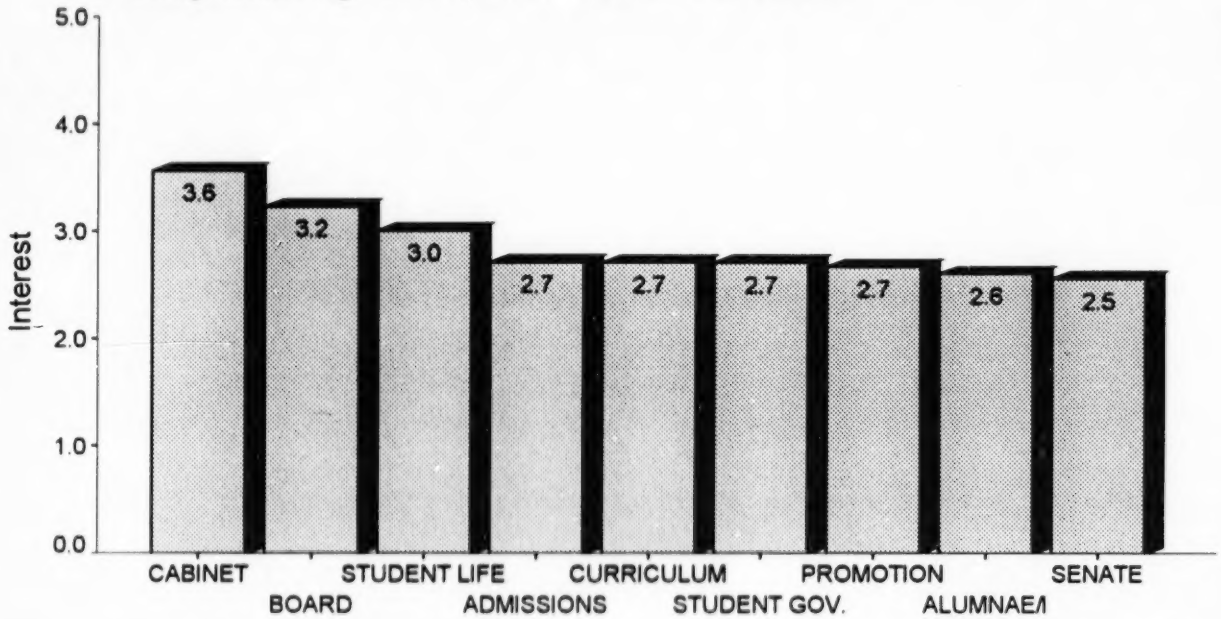

Figure 3.

Campus Constituencies Involvement in Service

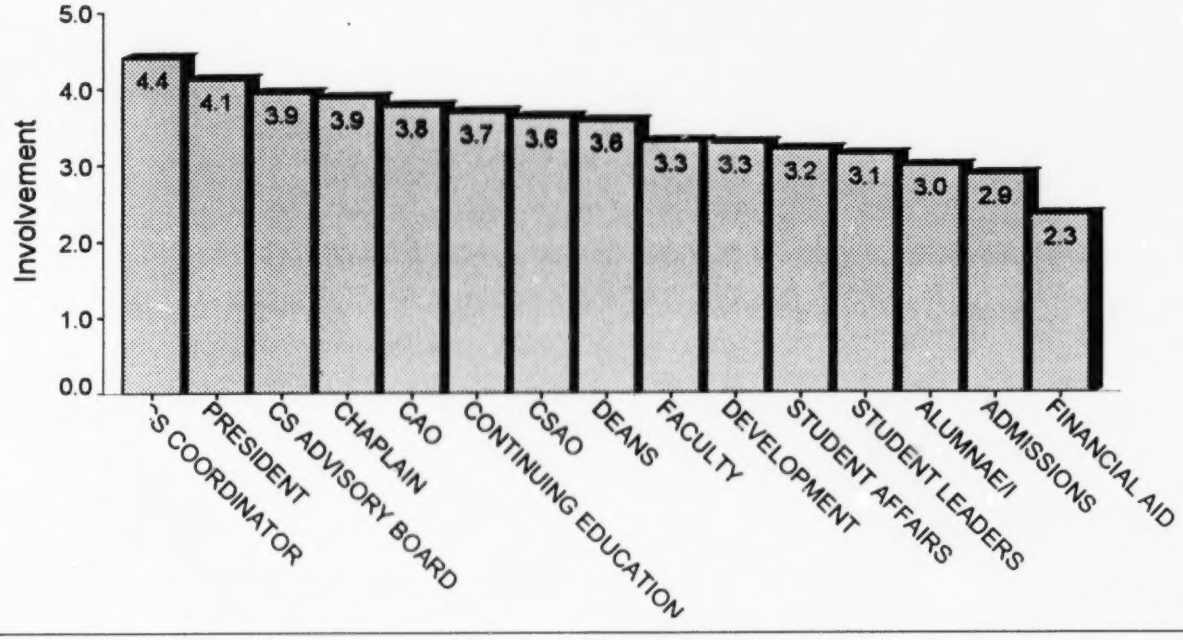

Figure 4.

Local Influence on Service

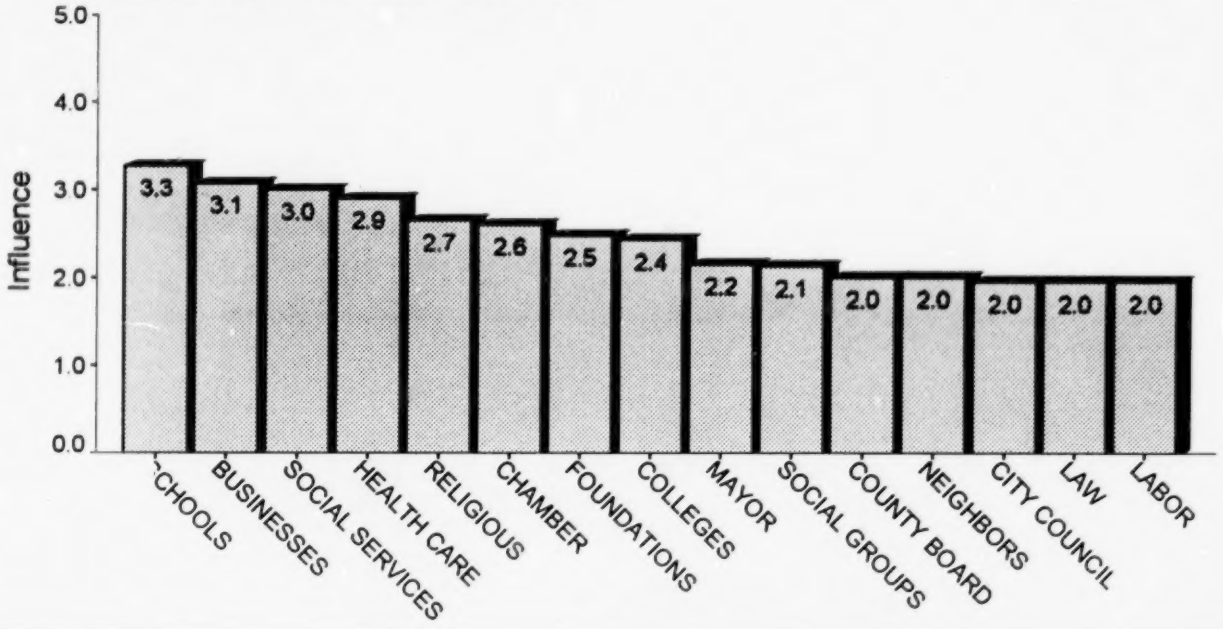

Figure 5.

State and National Influence on Service